

THE BRONX Beat

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A moment of silence for peace



LINDSAY POLLOCK

About 130 members of the New York Hispanic Clergy Organization prayed for peace at a breakfast meeting last Thursday at a Crotona Park church. Sen. Joseph Lieberman joined in, hoping to win their endorsement in his bid for the presidency. See Page 5.

No Yanks on cable at home

By Ted Phillips

The first pitch of the Yankees' season will be blacked out for the borough's cable subscribers again this year.

Talks between Cablevision and the YES Network collapsed Friday, three days before the Yankees' season opener in Toronto and two weeks after an apparent truce to the longstanding feud. The agreement would have put Yankees games on Cablevision for a monthly fee of \$1.95.

YES, the cable channel owned by the Yankees, broadcasts 130 of the team's games a season. Cablevision, based in Bethpage, L.I., is the primary cable provider in the borough.

"We're going to watch the WNBA all season?" said a disgusted Whity McGee, a bartender at the Yankee Tavern one block from Yankee stadium. "It's all about money. We're at war right now, and the one thing we want to take our mind off the war is watch the Yankees."

Fans missed all the games broadcast on YES last season when the two companies couldn't settle their differences, despite pressure from angry viewers and legislators in the city, Long Island, Albany and New Jersey.

In the pit



MELISSA NANN

A member of the all-girl Pius Princesses robotics team from St. Pius V High School tended to a wounded robot between matches at a recent competition at Riverbank State Park. See Page 8.

Faith offers a sanctuary in time of war

By Jordan Green

Nydia Cruz, a member of Love God Assembly in Fordham, watched her brother deploy with the Navy in December. "God is looking out for him. And he hears my prayers," said Cruz, her voice conveying both pride and worry as she wept.

Her brother, Felix Cruz, 20, is a radar technician who determines the target coordinates for the missiles aboard the destroyer USS Donald Cook.

For nearly a month, Cruz was unable to communicate with her brother. Once she became

hysterical during a church service. A woman in the congregation asked, "Do you have a loved one in the service?" Cruz nodded and the woman embraced her, inviting her to her home to pray.

More on war Pages 4-5

With the war in Iraq shaping up to be difficult and bloody, Nydia Cruz and others in the borough have turned to religious networks for comfort and support. Many churches have

See *Prayer* page 4

Clock Tower in rent dispute

By Itai Maytal

Sydney Jordan Cooley had good reason to move into an artist loft in the vacant South Bronx factory known as the Clock Tower. Eight months later, she says she has grounds to lead a tenant rent strike.

Last summer, while reading the *Village Voice*, the words "beautiful loft in historic Bronx building" grabbed Cooley's attention. The advertisement promised wood floors, high-speed Internet, bright lights and a laundry. The building was in a deserted and graffiti-covered section of Port Morris, but Cooley wasn't fazed.

"I had read a glowing review of the building in the *New York Times* real estate section," Cooley, an art student at the City College of New York, said. "And the model apartment I saw was beautiful."

The July 2002 article described apartments with uneven parquet floors, crisscrossed wooden joists and industrial window frames" alongside modern kitchens and bathrooms. Cooley visited 112 Lincoln Ave. to see an apartment. A broker promised an identical unit would be ready by September.

But reality proved otherwise.

Like the 18 other tenants at the former Estey Piano factory, soon to house 155 live-in art studios, Cooley found her apartment incomplete, she

said. Her bathroom floor was covered with concrete and grout residue, her hardwood floors were not swept and her windows did not close, she said. The apartment had no electricity or heat for the first month, she said.

Tenants complained to Carnegie Management Corp., the building manager, about standing water in a freight elevator and piles of trash on the first floor. They also complained about construction noise and the lack of laundry facilities and Internet wiring.

"They just threw up some walls, called it artist lofts and hoped that young people, students and artists wouldn't know any better," said Morgan Ress, an urban planning student.

Fourteen of 18 tenants organized an association in October to negotiate with the management company, which refused to recognize the group. The tenants stopped paying rent in December.

Management insists all the complaints have been resolved.

"There are one or two people who have no job and they have difficulty paying the rent," said Isaac Jacobs, a manager. "And they're trying to get other people to join them in their misery."

The association says management

See *Rent* page 6

Marble Hill awaits mall

By Eric V. White

These days, Edward Torres smiles at the construction site on 225th Street and Broadway, two blocks south of his beauty salon.

"That mall will make this neighborhood better," Torres, 44, owner of Edward's Beauty Salon, said.

Construction for River Plaza, a two-story mall in this four-block sliver of Marble Hill, started last November. Initially, many residents, including Torres, were concerned that the building project would increase traffic congestion and create dust. But the developer, Kingsbridge Associates, backed by Community Board 7 and local elected officials, assuaged their fears.

Now, most of the neighborhood, home to many low-income residents plagued by crime and drugs for decades, said they welcome the mall,

which is scheduled to open next March.

"I walk by the site every day and the dust billows, but I don't mind," said Erin Ferris, 22, who works nearby. She covers her face with a scarf when she passes, but, she said, it is a minor inconvenience compared with the added security that the mall and new businesses will bring.

Before construction, the area was saturated with abandoned gas stations and warehouses and was known as a drug den.

Mark Groblewski, director of construction for Kingsbridge Associates, said River Plaza would create more than 400 jobs. The \$20 million mall will house 20 businesses, including Marshalls, Applebee's, Washington Mutual and Kids World and have parking for 800.

The arrival of chain stores in other neighborhoods, like Harlem in Manhattan and Bedford-Stuyvesant

and Greenpoint in Brooklyn, concerned small-business owners. But not here.

"As far as me, they won't create a lot of competition," said Victor Ramirez, 43, owner of Mini-Mart, a convenience store on 226th Street. "The whole community shops at my store because we know what people like."

The owner of Flowers by Zenda, a shop on 226th Street, said she was not threatened by the mall either.

"We can co-exist," said Zenda, who declined to give her last name. She has seen businesses come and go. "We've had to compete a lot, but we've remained because of our customers," she said.

Angela Martinez said that even if the mall had a flower shop—there are no plans to build one—she would continue to shop at Zenda's because she believes in supporting local businesses.

"They're friends and they sell good things," said Martinez, a resident of

nearby Heath Avenue, still looks forward to having a mall. Like other residents, she has to travel, sometimes out of the borough, for certain items. Martinez said the need for more shops trumps concerns about traffic.

Ashok Barvalia, the neighborhood pharmacist, has traffic concerns too. But he said the opportunities the mall will provide will be worth the extra headache.

Marissa Forsing, a spokeswoman for RIPC Real Estate, which is handling leasing for the development, said many local businesspeople, including Barvalia, had inquired about renting space at River Plaza.

"We encourage them to come," Forsing said. "We want this to be a community mall."

Torres said he would like to open another salon in the mall.

"A second store would be great," Torres said. "And this mall will help me."

NEWS BRIEFS

5-K benefit race set

Herbert H. Lehman High School will stage a 5-kilometer race to raise funds in honor of former teacher and police officer, Dominick Pezzulo, who was killed at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. The "Run to Remember" starts at 9 a.m. and proceeds will benefit Sept. 11 victims.

Registration will start at 7 a.m. at 3000 East Tremont Ave.

The 3.1-mile course begins at Tremont and Westchester Avenues and includes parts of Tremont and Balcom Avenues, Ericson Place and Bruckner Boulevard.

Entry fees range from \$1 for children to \$15.

Free tax help

Retired accountants trained by the Internal Revenue Service will offer free tax help at the Bronx Overall Economic Development Center from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on April 4. Free Tax Assistance Day, now in its sixth year, has served hundreds of low-income and elderly people. Anyone interested must make an appointment and bring all relevant tax information. Information is available by calling the borough president's office at (718) 537-3386.

Fees drop

Restaurant owners with sidewalk cafés will pay less in fees than they were told in early March, according to the city's Department of Consumer Affairs, which has revised its original plan.

The scaled-back increase, which took effect last Friday, requires borough restaurants with enclosed sidewalk cafes to pay a base rate of \$2,880 for the first 70 square feet of space. Unenclosed sidewalk cafes, those without permanent barriers, will also pay a base rate for the first 70 square feet of space.



For mail and more

Kareem Myers is ready for business at the borough's first Mail Boxes Etc. The new store, which opened last Thursday at 1454 East Ave. in Parkchester, offers packing services, shipping through UPS, FedEx, DHL and the U.S. Postal Service, mailbox rentals, color copying, printing and binding, and notary services.

Megan Murphy

City forms will speak to all

By Tanya Pérez-Brennan

After just weeks in the United States, Sira Camara panicked. A native of Mali, in West Africa, she was overwhelmed while signing up for English classes by the myriad registration forms—written only in English.

Camara, a 21-year-old Bronx resident whose native language is Mandingo but who also speaks French, ended up filling out the wrong forms.

For many West African immigrants like Camara, navigating city agencies or even finding basic services can be a daunting task. Few places make materials available in any of the dozens of West African languages these immigrants speak. Occasionally, French translations are available, but many African immigrants do not speak it.

Earlier this month, however, immigrant advocates from social service agencies participated in the

first training session detailing laws on language access, led by the city's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the New York Lawyers for the Public Interest.

Federal law requires agencies receiving federal funds to provide translation services to people who don't speak English.

"Not providing translation services is a violation of rights," said Dee DeMusis, a case manager at the Grand Concourse immigration office of the Citizens Advice Bureau, a social service agency. Many of the bureau's clients complain of a lack of interpreters in hospitals and schools, said Foday Kamara, the coordinator for its refugee and asylum program. Kamara, who is from Sierra Leone, said he noticed the influx of West Africans when he started at the organization in September 2000.

According to census data, roughly 18,000 West Africans, most from Guinea and Nigeria, live in the

borough. The number of West Africans in the city is estimated at 120,000.

"Information is power, and without information people can't do what they're supposed to," said Kamara, who winds up interpreting on his neighborhood rounds and who has raised the issue at local meetings. "Materials should be translated for those people so they won't be left behind."

But many maintain that it is impractical to force organizations to make translations available in so many languages.

"These are not languages that are broadly written," said Scott Auwarter, director of case management services for the Citizens Advice Bureau's homelessness and HIV programs. Most African countries use colonial languages for official business, he said. HIV Positive Living is the only city program to have materials translated into Mandingo.

Some critics also argue that

translating documents will discourage newcomers from learning English.

But the elderly and the newly arrived need time to learn, advocates said.

Here for barely a year, Camara eventually enrolled in intensive English classes. But that's just the first step.

"If somebody comes into the country and doesn't speak English, how will they know anything?" she asked, speaking through an interpreter.

Translation prevents miscommunication and is beneficial for society as a whole, said Amy Taylor, policy director for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

"It always takes time to be proficient in a new language," she said. "It's a language barrier not only to immigrants, but to everyone in society."

THE BRONX Beat

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Evictions swamp court translators

By E.L. Wasson

The depth of the recession, and its impact on the borough's Hispanic community, can be measured by the line in front of Victor Hernandez and Shevonne Carrega.

"In November it was a record day," Carrega recalled. "Four thousand cases, and it seems like 80 percent are Spanish-speaking."

Carrega and Hernandez staff the City-Wide Task Force on Housing Court advice table in the Bronx Housing Court lobby on the Grand Concourse. Because the state provides only three official translators, they rarely get a break.

Evictions are up 20 percent this year, according to Joe Lamport, the task force director. Last year, clerk Bo Mykitschak said there were 112,989 cases, a record number.

"For many people, unemployment has run out," Hernandez said. "Now they're in trouble."

According to new figures from Comptroller William Thompson, the Bronx now has the highest unemployment rate in five years, 11.1 percent.

This week could set a new record

at housing court, Carrega said. Monday is always the busiest day, and this one falls on the 31st of the month, when many people are evicted.

Housing court moved to a new building five years ago, after languishing in the overcrowded basement of the main court building. Mykitschak said that even with 13 new courtrooms, it can't handle the growing caseload.

"It's unbelievable, the number of people you see coming in here," Mykitschak said.

Many of the tenants bring school-age children to interpret. For the rest, explaining the meanings of "order to show cause," "HP action" and "holdover" falls to Hernandez and Carrega.

"The language barrier is certainly one of the reasons the eviction rate is the highest in the Bronx," Carrega said. "Tenants don't understand the forms they sign."

When a tenant is about to be evicted, he or she should come to court and file an order to show cause to request a legal settlement.

Tenants must fill the form out in English.

In a holdover case, in which the landlord alleges that the tenant has violated a lease, the tenant has six months to vacate. But many landlords tell their tenants to get out right away, Carrega said.

Mercedes Guinyard said she withheld rent because her building on 161st was a mess ruled by junkies.

"I was there for 11 years and the landlord never repaired anything," Guinyard said.

When the landlord sued, she signed papers that ordered her to leave immediately. Carrega helped Guinyard explain to the judge that under the rules of a holdover case, she should be given time to move out.

When tenants get into trouble, small landlords often pay the price. Last week Jose Paulino had Hernandez translate a housing-part proceeding, or HP action, brought against him by the renter in his split-family home.

HP actions are brought by tenants to force the landlord to make repairs. Paulino said in his case, his tenant owed \$3,000 in back rent and was using the repair action to delay



E. L. WASSON

Victor Hernandez, left, explained housing court procedure in Spanish to landlord José Paulino. Shevonne Carrega, right, and Hernandez staff the City-Wide Task Force on Housing Court advice table weekday mornings.

payment.

"I'm a taxi driver and I've had to take six days off work," Paulino said.

Paulino was glad Hernandez was there to explain. Miscommunication can have dire consequences.

"It's the marginally employed that are really being hit," said John Stanley, a Legal Services lawyer at housing court. "It's the woman who

can't afford to miss a paycheck, whose mother dies and she has to fly down to Puerto Rico."

Hernandez said that one day last week, four families he tried to help were evicted by marshals.

"They give you 10 minutes to get a few things out, medicine for your kids, some clothes," he said. "And then they lock the door."

United against cuts



CLANCY NOLAN

Patricia Brooks joined dozens of union members last Thursday at North Central Bronx Hospital in urging patients and health care workers to sign petitions opposing \$2 billion in Medicaid cuts proposed by Gov. George E. Pataki. If the cuts go into effect, the city's 11 public hospitals will lose \$200 million and 4,000 jobs. The rally was part of a citywide effort by District Council 37, which represents 125,000 health care workers.

Charter school finally gets a home

By Daniel Burke

Robin Hubbard "contacted everyone under the sun" —local landlords, brokers and the borough president —to find a space that could hold the 80 children the ReadNet Bronx Charter School had enrolled.

But last August, with tears in her eyes, Hubbard addressed the parents gathered in the Bronx Center at Metropolitan College. After more than three years of recruiting teachers and students and raising funds, she told them that the school, scheduled to open in less than a month, would not. There was no building.

Charter schools have the freedom to develop their own curricula and school calendar. That, charter school advocates say, is the good part. The downside is that they get no capital funds, so administrators must find and pay for facilities on their own.

Hubbard went to a community center, but it couldn't accommodate the children. She went to an elder-care facility, but it wasn't available after 3 p.m. A site on the Grand Concourse was too close to high-speed traffic.

"We killed ourselves to find a space," Hubbard said. "I don't know who was more upset. The level of disappointment was immeasurable."

Since the New York State Charter School Act became law in 1998, 18 charter schools have popped up around the city, five of which are in the borough. Four more are scheduled to open in the Bronx next September.

Local lawmakers expected charter schools to alleviate the overcrowded public school system and offer parents choices. The schools are public in every way, open to all city children no matter where they live, and are tuition free.

Hubbard refers to the most difficult aspects of starting a charter school as the three F's, facilities, funding and freedom.

Hubbard, who had worked in education in Harlem for 12 years, decided to start a school. She received approval from the state Board of

Regents in 2000 for a school concentrating students in history and literacy.

She planned to house the school at Metropolitan College, but that didn't work out. "Facilities are more than four walls and a roof," Hubbard said. The exits, fire escapes and restrooms were designed for college students, not for kindergarteners. At the last minute, plans to renovate had to be scrapped for lack of time and money.

But she never stopped looking. And in January, Hubbard did find a site, on 148th Street between Brook and Bergen avenues.

It's not perfect, Hubbard said. "It is what some people might call a vanilla box." But she has conscripted an army of volunteers to help her make the building as fun and charming as possible.

Volunteers make up a huge part of the game plan for charter schools, which receive about \$7,000 per student from the state through the school district. Public schools get about \$9,000.

In poor economic times it's even more difficult for charter schools to open.

"It's harder because people have to raise private money to deal with start-up and facilities," said Gerry Vazquez, president of the New York Charter School Resource Center. "And like charities around the city, charter schools are being squeezed because there are not as many dollars around."

Finally, if the schools get the funding and facilities, they have to deal with the double-edged sword of freedom.

The opportunity to design and use a unique curriculum lures most charter school administrators. But their students still have to pass the state's exams — at a higher rate than public schools — and the schools have to make sure they don't promise more than they can deliver.

Despite the many obstacles they have faced, the ReadNet Bronx Charter School plans to open in September.

Talk helps reassure kids

By Barbara Otutay

Sitting in a Mott Haven Burger King with the latest issue of Time magazine in front of him, Alberto Toledo said it is vital to talk openly with children about the war.

Toledo said the most important and most difficult thing for children to comprehend at times like these is that death is natural.

"It's very hard for them to understand," Toledo said, pointing a tattooed arm toward his 9-year-old granddaughter, who sat across the table from him. "No kid knows about death."

But Jonathan Gonzalez, Toledo's 13-year-old neighbor, knows about death. His adult cousin Guillermo Gonzalez died at the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001.

"They never found him," Jonathan's mother, Gloria Gonzalez, 45, said of her nephew. She said Jonathan has been depressed ever since.

"I don't speak too much about the war," she said. "When we talk, we pray. We pray for us, we pray for the country."

With the war's death toll rising

Prayer

From page 1

been holding additional services to accommodate people who want to pray for peace and the safety of American soldiers with other members of their congregations.

The Immaculate Conception Church in Williamsbridge held a special Mass for peace last Wednesday evening, displaying photographs of soldiers on the altar.

"We're praying especially for all the members of the church who are serving in the military to remind the parish that part of us is there," said the Rev. Nick Mormando.

The church has five members deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom. One woman who belongs to the church has three sons there. A young man had to postpone his wedding when his fiancé was deployed.

In other congregations, it is much the same. One member of Trinity Baptist Church, also in Williamsbridge, recently shipped out to Kuwait. Parishioners of St. John Chrisostom's in Morrisania and St. Ann's Church in Norwood have family members in the war.

While awaiting word from her brother, Cruz read a newspaper article on March 20 that said her brother's ship was in the Red Sea. The day before, Tomahawk cruise missiles fired from the USS Donald Cook were part of initial air strike against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

Soon after, Felix Cruz e-mailed

and memories from the terrorist attacks still fresh for many families, the most important thing parents can do is reassure their children that they will be safe, child psychologists say.

"Parents need to be aware of their child's developmental level," said Mary Pat Wachter, a psychologist at the Institute for Trauma and Stress at the New York University Child Study Center. "Preschool-aged children need to know that they didn't do anything to cause this, that Mom and Dad will be there to take care of them. Older children are more apt to engage in discussion."

While reassurance is important, adults should also be realistic about the war, especially when a family member is in the military.

"Children are not stupid," said Katherine Cowan, communications manager for the National Association of School Psychologists. "They know war is dangerous, that combat is dangerous."

Toledo stressed that children should understand the value of their freedom, and added that war

is part of the human experience. But being aware of the war in Iraq does not mean children should be exposed to gruesome news coverage, psychologists say. The younger the children, the more upset and overwhelmed they may become after hearing or seeing bad news. It is hard for them to draw lines between their own world and what goes on somewhere far away.

"It's terrible," Gonzalez said of war coverage. "I don't want him to watch it."

Gonzalez and her family visit a psychologist once a week, and Jonathan also sees someone separately.

"We tell him we are going to protect him, that everything will be OK," she said.

As Gonzalez did, parents can look for signs that their children have been adversely affected by world events. These signs include prolonged withdrawal from normal activities, regressive behavior and anxiety that does not go away. Such significant behavioral changes may require professional help.

Keeping a normal routine also helps children remain grounded and feel safe.

"They need to know that the adults in their lives are taking care of the world," Wachter said. "And they can also do their job, by going to school."

Understanding war

Resources for children and parents

Books:

"Hut School and the Wartime Home-Front Heroes"

Robert Burch

"The Diary of a Young Girl"

Anne Frank

"And One for All"

Theresa Nelson

"My Daddy Was a Soldier: A World War II Story"

Deborah Kogan Ray

"My Friend's Beliefs: A Young Reader's Guide to World Religions"

Hiley Ward

"The Middle East (Conflict in the 20th Century Series)"

Charles Messenger

Web sites:

www.aboutourkids.org/articles/war_iraq.html

www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/war/

www.nycenet.edu/whatsnew/guidelines/guides.asp

Source: NYU Child Study Center Web site: www.aboutourkids.org

BEAT ON THE STREET

Bronxites discuss the prospect of compulsory military service.



Rafael Chaluian, Castle Hill
"I'm a Vietnam veteran. I was drafted when I was 19. The draft in one sense is good because some of these young kids in the street, it gives them a chance to travel. The bad part about it is the loss of life."



Mike Rodriguez, Norwood
"People in lower socioeconomic groups and minorities are usually drafted and sent out. Younger people in this community don't have economic opportunity. Their one avenue for economic advancement is joining the military."



Owen Goulbourn, Soundview
"It's a waste of time because they're going to get killed anyway. It's the civilians that get hurt - the poor people, the starving."



Lee Rodriguez, South Bronx
"People should be more than willing to help out for their country without any complaints. I'm going into the Navy in four months. I joined the military before we thought about going to war. I'm not going to back down now."

Vinnee Tong



COURTESY OF NYDIA CRUZ

Felix Cruz (front row, right), poses for a picture with his Navy division. Cruz, 20 is a radar technician aboard the USS Donald Cook, a naval destroyer that recently fired Tomahawk cruise missiles in an air strike on Baghdad.

his sister from the ship. "Take it easy," he wrote. "I'll be back soon. Saddam can't do anything to us. We're a really powerful military."

Michael Vasquez, 20, an Army reservist and student at Manhattan Community College, is awaiting deployment. He may be called to help coordinate logistics for the supply lines from Kuwait to Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. Also a member of Love God Assembly, Vasquez said he takes strength from the prayers of his fellow worshippers.

For other religious institutions like Islamia Sunna Wal Jam'ah in Mount Hope Place, where some 1,500 Muslims attend Friday prayers, the fate of American

soldiers is not the central preoccupation.

"Everywhere around the world, people know the war is wrong," said Al Razzak, a member of the mosque. "We pray for innocent people, that God bless them. Even people who are fighting for America, we pray for them, too, because they're dying for nothing."

Razzak did not know whether any of the mosque's members are with the U.S. military.

At Pelham Parkway Jewish Center, Rabbi Meyer Leifer said the sentiments of his largely elderly congregation tilted in favor of the war.

"Taking human life is a terrible thing," he said, "but many feel

that this is a necessary evil to avoid much greater bloodshed."

"This is not a war against Islam," he added. "There are many Iraqis who want this because Saddam has hurt them very much."

President Bush, while framing the conflict in starkly moral terms, has taken pains to avoid casting it as a religious war. But for those who do the fighting, religious faith can play a powerful role.

Vasquez turned to the verses of Psalm 91 in the Bible: "You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday."

ews from the Bronx

Veterans concerned over POWs' pain

By Hide Tamura

Anthony Quagliano turns off the television whenever pictures of American soldiers captured by the Iraqis appear.

"I just can't watch it," said Quagliano, a Country Club resident. "I have flashbacks."

Quagliano was a prisoner of war in World War II. For him, and other POWs from previous wars, seeing the U.S. soldiers captured by Iraqi forces is triggering memories of their own internment. He and another former POW discussed what current war captives may be experiencing and expressed ambivalence about media coverage of the seven Americans captured by Iraqi forces last week. At least twenty are missing.

Iraqi national television



HIDE TAMURA

Anthony Quagliano, wearing his POW cap and blazer, recalls his experiences in a prison camp.

showed pictures of captured and apparently dead American soldiers that were aired by networks around the world. In most American broadcasts, the faces of unidentified American soldiers were blurred.

Quagliano, 79, recalled his capture by German soldiers during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, the day before he was due to go home for a month's vacation. For the first week after his capture, Quagliano said, he and seven comrades were not given food or water and had to sleep on the floor.

After a long march to a prison camp, he was interrogated relentlessly. Once, Quagliano said, the German soldiers put toothpicks under his fingernails to break his silence. He passed out. He weighed 202 pounds when captured. When he was liberated after five and a half months in the camp, his weight was just 112 pounds.

"I know what it's like to be a prisoner of war," Quagliano said. "The pictures of the captured soldiers remind me of that."

Quagliano is the commander of the Greater New York chapter of American Ex-Prisoners of War, a national group supporting former POWs and their families. He says there may be hundreds of borough residents who were captured by enemies during past wars, though it is hard to know the exact number. Nationwide, about 140,000 Americans have been captured in wars since World War I. More than 40,000 are believed to be living, according to the group.

Marshall Siciliano, 81, of Eastchester, spent two and a half years in German prison camps. He watches news more than five hours a day on average, even though a hospital worker advised him not to view pictures of military combat because it may worsen his health condition, post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I have occasional flashbacks

of my war experiences when I watch the war coverage on television," said Siciliano. "But I'm really concerned about the welfare of the prisoners of war. I hope they are treated with respect."

Though he was forced to work at construction sites for 12 to 14 hours a day during his captivity, Siciliano said he was treated according to the Geneva Convention. But the first few days of his captivity were "absolutely scary" as he worried about possible torture or execution.

Siciliano suspects that POWs in Iraq are not being treated properly, judging from what he sees on the television. "They may be going through the fear I felt," said Siciliano. "I just want to tell them to stay cool, to keep talking and hoping that the war is going to be over soon, which is what I did."

War brings back Albanian memories

By Ted Phillips

As bombs began falling on Baghdad on March 19, two wars preoccupied Albanians in Belmont.

The war in Kosovo, which ended after a U.S.-led air campaign forced Yugoslavia to withdraw troops in 1999, is the lens through which many view the conflict in Iraq. In many Albanians' minds, Saddam Hussein is the same as Slobodan Milosevic, the deposed Serbian president now on trial for war crimes in the Hague.

In the Albanian shops along Arthur Avenue, the American red, white and blue mingles with the red-orange-and-black insignias of the Kosovo Liberation Army. And in a corner of the smoky Drini Café, CNN's latest dispatches from Iraq held Dilber Kukij's attention.

"Whatever happens, we gonna be with the United States," he said. "I'm ready to go fight for this country. I'm ready to die for this country."

He pulled out a document he filled out when he became a citizen six months ago. At 36, Kukij is too old to fight, but he smiled when he pointed at the question where he had reaffirmed his willingness to bear arms for the United States. His enthusiasm and gratitude toward his adopted homeland is typical.

Kukij's friend, Ali Ahmetaj, chimed in. "They helped us and we would love to help them."

On March 20, Rep. Eliot Engel, a New York Democrat who is co-chairman of the congressional Albanian Issues Caucus, wrote a letter to his colleagues in the U.S. House informing them that the United States has the support of Albania, Kosovo and the Albanian people. Albania has sent 70

commandos to the Persian Gulf; about 400 Albanians rallied in support of the United States and Great Britain on March 21 in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, which is still part of Serbia.

"We did not take a poll, but everyone we talked to supported the United States," said Sokol Rama, editor for the English section of Illyria, a Manhattan-based newspaper serving the Albanian-American community. "They view the war as a war of liberation, and they see a huge similarity between this war and the war in Kosovo. They see a similarity between Milosevic and Saddam Hussein."

But enthusiasm for the war is not absolute. Vjollca Jakupi, an office manager from the Manhattan-based Albanian American Women's Organization, experienced war in Kosovo firsthand.

"I feel sorry for American people who go there and fight, and also I feel sorry for the Iraqi women and children," she said. "Better 10 years spent talking to find a solution than 10 minutes of war."

Back on Arthur Avenue, Xhevat Ruhani sipped coffee at a pizzeria. Ruhani recalled the American and British air raids on his hometown, Pristina, and his fear that Serbian paramilitaries would hurt his family. Seven days into the air war, the Ruhanis fled Pristina, and eventually resettled in Belmont.

He sees the current war as a war to liberate the Iraqi people and staunchly supports the United States.

"Kosovo's people understand very well what is a dictator, what is the war," he said. "This regime has to go. They don't want peace, they don't want to disarm, so there is no other way."



LINDSAY POLLOCK

Sen. Joseph Lieberman, a Democratic presidential hopeful, addressed a meeting of church leaders. He was joined by, from left, Assemblyman Rubén Díaz Jr., Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and state Sen. Rubén Díaz Sr.

Lieberman courts borough clergy

By Lindsay Pollock

In a speech laced with religious references, Sen. Joseph Lieberman tried to win support from church leaders gathered at a Crotona Park church last Thursday.

Lieberman, a Democrat from Connecticut who is running for president, spoke during a breakfast meeting at the Eternal Rock Christian Church to about 130 members of the New York Hispanic Clergy Organization, run by state Sen. Rubén Díaz Sr. Lieberman criticized President Bush's planned tax cuts, saying they would give money to the wealthy. On the subject of war, however, he was careful to ally himself with the president.

"There is not an inch, not one inch of distance between Joe Lieberman and George Bush about wanting to win this war," he said.

The clergy members greeted calls to support American troops in Iraq with raucous applause, but afterward many said they opposed the war in Iraq.

"I support the troops and not the

war," said Bishop Silva Kittim, head of the International Council of Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ, a group of 300 churches across the United States.

Lieberman tried to connect with the crowd by linking his family history to the plight of immigrants today, saying he would fight for amnesty for undocumented immigrants if elected.

"If one group goes up, everybody goes up," Lieberman said, standing between Díaz and Sheldon Silver, the state Assembly speaker. "You're entitled to go as far as your God-given talents will take you." The last presidential hopeful to visit the Bronx was Al Gore, who came with Lieberman when they were on the presidential ticket in 2000.

"Our nation is in a difficult situation," Díaz said, jabbing his hand in the air. "Our young men and women are fighting and sharing their blood. We are calling for a prayer for peace."

As the clergy members dug into plates filled with eggs and bacon, Díaz welcomed his son, Rubén Díaz

Jr., the newly elected assemblyman, to speak. Díaz Jr. said he was against war but supported the mission to replace Iraq's regime. He saved his fire for local concerns, unwilling to let talk of war overshadow problems at home.

"We are still fighting another war, when you talk about the government who is cutting budgets," Díaz Jr. said.

He spoke against Gov. George E. Pataki's proposed cuts to health care, education and senior programs. Politicians should be concerned about the borough's unemployment rate, at 11 percent more than double the national average, Díaz Jr. said.

After the breakfast, the church leaders' talk returned to war. Kittim said that most Hispanic clergy members oppose the war and that the applause for Bush was just part of the political game.

Kittim's congregants in Richmond Hills, N.Y., get comfort from prayer, he said.

"We are praying for soldiers," he said, "but also that God can give wisdom to our country."

Park or plant? Deadline nears

By Marc Parry

Time is running out for foes of a resurrected plan to build a \$1 billion water-filtration plant in Van Cortlandt Park.

Opponents thought they had defeated the project after the state's highest court rejected it in 2001. But last week it emerged that the Bloomberg administration had been quietly pushing to build the plant under the Mosholu Golf Course.

Park advocates are scrambling to beat back the proposal before April 30, the deadline for the city to present its preferred site to the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

On Friday, advocates lobbied Borough President Adolfo Carrión Jr., who is on the fence despite his strong opposition to the plant in the past. On Saturday, 30 demonstrators picketed Bronx Democratic Party headquarters, where city

officials pitched the project to legislators in a private meeting March 20.

For the people who live next to Van Cortlandt Park, the process of sinking filtration machinery underground would mean up to seven years of noisy trucks, pollution and traffic. Beyond the usual not-in-my-backyard complaints, park advocates say the plan underscores a larger trend: the seizure of public parkland for nonpark purposes.

"This opens a Pandora's box," said Paul Sawyer, executive director of Friends of Van Cortlandt Park. "If it goes through, the third-largest park in New York City is going to be the 30th largest because they will continue to sell off land for whatever price is offered."

Sawyer and other advocates cited the United Nations' push to build a tower in Robert Moses Park in Manhattan and the Office of Emergency

Management's plan to build a new headquarters on part of Walt Whitman Park in downtown Brooklyn as examples of the trend.

But the Department of Environmental Protection, the city agency responsible for the filtration project, says its Van Cortlandt plan differs from those because it would be temporary. The agency says it will return and restore the land after building the underground facility.

Van Cortlandt is one of several sites the city has considered for the project, which stems from a federal order requiring the city to filter water from the upstate Croton Aqueduct system. The decade-long search encompassed the Jerome Park Reservoir, a site along the Harlem River near the University Heights Bridge and an industrial park in Westchester County.

DEP Commissioner Christopher Ward said last

week that he preferred the Van Cortlandt site because it would save the city \$200 million to \$500 million and would bring jobs to the Bronx.

Ward also noted that the new plan would affect only 28 acres of the 1,150-acre park. The previous proposal would have involved 78 acres, the size of six football fields.

That pitch convinced Assemblyman Jose Rivera of the Bronx when Ward presented it to him in the March 20 meeting. Rivera has come out in favor of the plan — some say because of the \$150 million in so-called mitigation fees it would bring home to the borough. Rivera did not return phone calls seeking comment.

For the city to begin construction, both houses of the state legislature and the governor must approve the project. The City Council also has to sign off on the plan.

Park advocates are livid that officials have awarded a

contract for the construction and have kept them in the dark about a draft bill that would legalize the land transfer.

"I find it interesting that they are quietly slipping this through while we are so distracted with the war and terrorism," said Rowena Daly, spokeswoman for New Yorkers for Parks.

Daly also noted that building a key piece of infrastructure in a densely populated urban neighborhood could make an attractive target for terrorists.

Security concerns are among the reasons two legislators whose districts include the site — Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz and City Councilman G. Oliver Koppell — oppose the project. Both have pledged to vote against it and hope to prevail on their colleagues to do the same.

"Responsible elected officials should be opposing construction in Van Cortlandt Park and trying to find a different way," Dinowitz said.

Proposed legislation seeks to stimulate development

By John Romano

Barretto Point is littered with debris and polluted from years of dumping. The site of a former paint factory, the five-acre lot is the borough's only brownfield, land condemned by pollution.

But now, Barretto Point is poised to be cleaned and converted into a neighborhood park. And state legislators hope it will be the first of many sites throughout the city that could be transformed from a barren parcel into an active site for business or community use, with the passage of new legislation.

Earlier this month, the state Senate passed Bill 2935, which attempts to make brownfield redevelopment easier. The Assembly is currently drafting its own legislation.

"This legislation will bring these parcels back to life, improve public health and turn an economic drain into an economic gain," said Long Island state Sen. Carl Marcellino in a press release. As chairman of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, Marcellino sponsored

the bill.

The state brownfields program, started in 1996 with \$200 million, provides grants to municipalities to investigate and clean the sites. A brownfield can be any parcel of land where there is a risk of contamination from former activities on the site.

Since 1996, \$26 million has been spent on 102 brownfield sites identified statewide, according to Department of Environmental Conservation statistics. Mathy Stamislaus of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, which supported the Senate's bill, said there are approximately 6,000 potential brownfields in the city.

Identifying brownfields has been difficult, and the program has not had the success many legislators envisioned. Part of the reason is the vague terminology in the current brownfields legislation, as well as the burden of liability for future developers of the sites.

"We have to come up with a definition of brownfields," said borough Assemblyman Ruben Diaz

Jr., a member of the Environmental Conservation Committee. He said the Senate's bill misses that point and also fails to provide enough opportunity for community participation and strong clean-up standards.

At Barretto Point, investigators have identified byproducts of commercial and industrial activities in the soil. The DEC will clean the site before the city Parks Department begins to build the park, which will include a waterfront walkway, benches, a boat launch, fields and an amphitheater.

The New York Public Interest Research Group is one organization that worries that the bill does not go far enough to remove contaminants from the brownfield.

"The Senate bill has some serious problems," said Laura Haight, a senior environmental associate at NYPIRG. "People are anxious to get brownfields into use. But we have to do it right."

The Senate's legislation exempts developers from possible lawsuits from any future consequences of the contamination, such as if it moves onto adjacent property. Currently new landowners are responsible even if they didn't realize the land was contaminated.

The bill also allows the use of engineering controls, such as paving, planting grass and water filters, to reduce human exposure to contamination and prevent it from spreading, but leaves the contaminants on the site.

Information about brownfields is available a ww.dec.state.ny.us/website/der/bfield/index.html.



ITAI MAYTAL

Rod Rodriguez, an art studio tenant at 112 Lincoln Ave., points out a window that had problems closing.

Rent

From page 1

falsely assured tenants that their apartments were habitable. The company wants overdue rent, while the tenants want absolution from those payments. The matter will be resolved legally, said Garrett J. Woodworth, a tenant who studies law at Fordham University.

But several real estate agents questioned the expectations of tenants who pay \$1,000 to \$1,600 a month for apartments ranging from 600 to 1,000 square feet.

"When you go into a building that's not finished, there is always noise and delays in construction," said Peter Cokin, a commercial real estate broker. "Besides, when you pay \$1,000 a month for an apartment in New York City, how much should you expect?"

Rod Rodriguez, a teacher and photographer, did not expect his

windows to dry-rot away, exposing his apartment to the elements for three weeks. Steven Digges, a photographer, never expected a 40-pound kitchen cabinet to collapse, destroying his glassware.

Since withholding their rent, tenants have complained of harassing phone calls, uninvited visits to their apartments and threatening letters from the management company. The tenants also worried that the building lacked proper residential zoning. In 2000, 60 artists were evicted from their lofts in Williamsburg for that reason. Carnegie Management at the Clock Tower maintains tenants' leases only allow for commercial art studios, but tenants remember hearing differently.

"As a tenant with no place to go, in a city where finding an apartment is nearly impossible, I am at the mercy of my landlord," Woodworth said. "I have no choice but to trust the word of my landlord."



JOHN ROMANO

Barretto Point, in Hunts Point, is located at the intersection of Barretto Street and Viele Avenue. It is the borough's only designated brownfield site and will be cleaned and converted into a park.

Black history is a story to be told

By Clancy Nolan

A group of historians plans to uncover the full story of African-Americans in the borough.

The Bronx African-American History Project, a partnership between the borough's historical society and Fordham University's African and African-American Studies department, will incorporate oral histories, public and church records and census data to tell the history of blacks in the borough in the last 60 years.

"The Bronx viewed by the public is the Bronx of the 1970s and '80s of decay and despair," says Mark Naison, a Fordham history professor and co-founder of the project. "But there's obviously an incredible story that's not incorporated."

Stacks of videos like "Off the Hook" and "Wild Style" line the windowsill of Naison's office, and he bobs his head to "Cross Bronx Expressway" by rappers Lord Tariq and Peter Gunz, while he talks. He grabs another CD, slips it into his computer and the Chantels' crooning doo-wop fills the room.

"The Chantels met in the choir at St. Anthony's of Padua Catholic School in Morrisania," he says. "This is what people sang on the street corner 50 years ago."

Naison said the project would initially focus on the 1940s, when the borough's African-American population grew fivefold, from 20,000 to nearly 100,000.

Southern blacks moving into the borough were then joined by thousands of people leaving Harlem in search of affordable housing. Harlem, bounded by 155th Street on the north and by 110th Street on the south, was increasingly crowded at the time. Washington Heights to the north, then a large Irish Catholic community, was not receptive to African-American neighbors, and the rents south of 110th Street skyrocketed. The South Bronx, though, was right across the river, and its Jewish community was largely progressive. And the city was building affordable public housing in large numbers.

"Public housing in the 1950s was a totally different experience," Naison said. "People had these very positive feelings about it."

The project was born out of a conversation last fall between Naison and Peter Derrick of the Bronx Historical Society. Derrick said that residents searching for information about African-Americans in the borough, or histories of specific neighborhoods, were often out of luck. Though there are more than a half-million people of African descent in the borough, Derrick said, there are few resources about their history.

"There's been a whole glorious literature about Harlem and the Harlem Renaissance," Derrick said. "But there have been African-American people doing things in the Bronx for a long time."

Naison said the project would also focus on recent history, from the 1970s on, when blacks from the Caribbean and Africa stopped settling in the South Bronx and began migrating directly to the neighborhoods farther north, like White Plains Road. He also hopes to add a component about Bronx music, which he will title "From Doo-Wop to Hip-Hop."

For now, the project is largely a volunteer effort, though Naison is also applying for grant money.

Habitat for Mott Haven

By Matthew Gluth

A small group of future homeowners, city officials and neighborhood pastors dug shovels into the ground of a Mott Haven lot and tossed dirt into the air.

The ceremony last Tuesday was the groundbreaking for 13 single-family row houses, the largest Habitat for Humanity construction project in the borough. Habitat for Humanity aims to help low- and middle-income families become homeowners.

Each of the three-story, 1,500-square-foot houses has three bedrooms and front and back yards.

"I am blessed," said Lynette Davis, a future owner of one of the semiattached homes. "We're going to start working May 1. All the families are going to take turns working."

Each family will put in 600 hours, mostly on weekends, to help transform the empty lot at East 150th Street and Tinton Avenue. Construction crews have laid foundations and some concrete-block walls. The homes will be completed by the end of the year, Habitat for Humanity representatives said.

"It was a pretty awful rubble-strewn vacant lot, a community eyesore that we were happy to help clean up," said Roland Lewis, executive director of Habitat for Humanity-New York City. The city donated the site through New Foundations, a homeownership program started in 2000.

George Rodriguez, chairman of Community Board 1, welcomed the new residents to the neighborhood. But he made a plea for more multifamily homes in Mott Haven.

Mott Haven has more single-family dwellings per capita than any other neighborhood in the



COURTESY OF RICHARD CORSON

Local officials and major contributors to Habitat for Humanity-New York City breaking ground on a 13-home project at East 150th Street and Tinton Avenue.

city, Rodriguez said. Much of the emphasis on single-family housing has been part of a community plan to draw middle-income families, who would boost economic development in the neighborhood.

The switch to single-family construction, however, has also had the unintentional effect of lowering the population in Mott Haven, Rodriguez said. This has reduced federal money for the area. A recent increase in homelessness has also caused a need for more housing.

This is the third Habitat for Humanity project in the borough. In the past two years, six homes were built on East 170th Street and one was assembled on Morris Avenue.

Mott Haven has the highest percentage of people in poverty in the city. According to the 2000 Census, more than 65 percent of its residents are below the poverty line, compared

with about 20 percent citywide. Only one in 10 owns a home, one of the city's lowest homeownership rates, according to the Department of City Planning.

A typical mortgage payment for the new Mott Haven homes, which cost \$100,000 to \$130,000, will be \$350 to \$400 a month on a 20-year interest-free loan.

Habitat for Humanity applicants must live in substandard housing, spokeswoman Connie Sargent said. Such dwellings would have leaky roofs, mold or vermin infestations, insecure foundations, or poor heat or hot water.

"We applied and now we're here," said Kim Summers, a future owner. "This is overwhelming. I'm going to work on our home this summer with my son."

Her teenage son Malik added, "It's good to work with your neighbors. You bond before you move in."

Training empowers seniors

By Matthew E. Milliken

Viola L. Doswell inherited her penchant for activism from her grandmother. She honed it as a union representative. But Doswell, an 81-year-old Concourse Village resident, credits the Institute for Senior Action with helping her fight to improve senior citizens' quality of life.

"The way we are able to mobilize seniors to fight for our rights gives us a stronger, more powerful voice," Doswell said. The institute's alumni help seniors collect benefits and find other resources, educate their peers about policy and lobby public officials. And they send a message to politicians, she said. "We put you in. We can take you out."

The Joint Public Affairs Committee for Older Adults, a government-financed advocacy organization, runs the institute each fall and spring at its headquarters in Midtown

Manhattan. More than 400 students have completed the 10-week course, which is sponsored by various politicians and foundations, since it started nine years ago. A group of 28 began training March 13.

As a 20-year-old caring for her parents, Doswell found that many seniors didn't know about government programs that can ease the burdens of aging. Since attending the institute's first class in 1994, Doswell has mounted letter-writing campaigns, signed petitions and demonstrated to preserve or expand senior services.

Many institute students have union backgrounds like that of Doswell, who was a shop steward at a fashion company. Vasdev Advani, an activist in training, is a vice president for the retirees association of District Council 37, the municipal employees' union. Advani, an 81-year-old Pelham Parkway resident, is one

of four Bronxites among the institute's current class.

He is interested in fighting to preserve Medicare, Social Security and pensions. "You cannot take away the basic needs of the people and use the money to help rich people, thinking that they will spend the money and satisfy the needs," said Advani, a former child welfare caseworker.

Kathryn Gibson of Parkchester, another current student, founded the Grandparent's Advocacy Project in 1998 to help those who are raising their grandchildren solve custody, entitlement and educational problems.

"Grandparents are not given first dibs on a child, and that's a major issue for us," said the 57-year-old Gibson, a communications and literature professor at John Jay College.

Institute classes are held from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Thursdays at the Joint Public Affairs Committee conference room. Lecturers come from the United Hospital Fund, the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Jobs with Justice and other organizations.

The committee is backing a boycott of GlaxoSmithKline products, including Tums, Aquafresh and Geritol, because of threats the company made against Canadian pharmacies that sell heavily discounted drugs to American customers. A handmade sign on the conference-room wall says "Tums Down to Glaxo."

When he completes the institute's 10-week course in May, Advani will disseminate Joint Public Affairs Committee information at his union's retirement association meetings. Despite arthritis and heart trouble, he's still fighting for senior entitlement programs.

"Even if I reach out to 10 people," Advani said, "I still make a difference."



MATTHEW E. MILLIKEN

Kathryn Gibson of Parkchester drew a diagram for an introductory exercise at the Institute for Senior Action.

Robotics teams do battle and bond

By Melissa Nann

Players on the mats. Drivers on the line. Ready. Set. Go!

With the buzz of the clock, No. 395 whirled into action as Buster Poindexter's "Hot Hot Hot" blared over the loudspeakers at Riverbank State Park at West 145th Street in Harlem.

So we go rum-bum-bum-bum.

The boxy robot veered around a corner to the base of a ramp, rushed up and over the incline, and knocked 13 blue plastic containers piled at the top into its scoring zone on the far side of the ramp.

No. 395's driver jostled the joystick to recklessly steer the robot around the playing field by remote control. The robot's shiny perforated-aluminum casing gleamed under the overhead spotlights.

"Three-nine-five! Three-nine-five! Three-nine-five!" the robot's team from Morris High School in Morrisania chanted.

Though not as competitive as NASCAR, the two-day contest among 31 hand-built robots at the New York City FIRST Regional Robotics Competition earlier this month had an added motivator: school spirit. Seven borough high schools took part in the third annual event, pitting their inventions against robots from the five boroughs, as well as Connecticut, Massachusetts, California and Britain.

For the duration of the two-minute match, No. 395 whizzed around the field of play, pinned other robots in corners, nudged blue crates into the scoring zone and ended triumphantly at the top of the ramp for an extra 25-points — victorious.

The crowd hollered. Team

members hooted. Morris advanced to the semifinals.

The Riverbank competition began six weeks ago, when each student team partnered with a university or corporate mentor to design a robot that was more box-on-wheels than R2-D2. The teams followed guidelines for the machine's weight, size and other components. The robots then competed in a game designed by the competition coordinator, FIRST, which stands for For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology.

At another regional competition earlier in March, Morris and Alfred E. Smith high schools qualified for the national championship, set for April 10-12 in Houston.

Last Wednesday, the Yankees, one of the Morris sponsors, announced they would pay the \$11,000 to send the Morris team to Texas.

"I'm floored," said Gary Israel, a Morris teacher and team adviser.

"Being located in the poorest congressional district in the country, Morris doesn't have the greatest reputation."

But since the team started four years ago, he said, "the people around us have thought of Morris as the high school that has the great robotics team. It makes a difference."

Morris High principal Jose Ruiz praised the team's influence on students.

"It helps them connect classroom learning to the real world and keeps their focus on education," Ruiz said. "It also gets them to socialize outside of their regular environment. Sometimes the kids get too used to the neighborhood. They get stuck there and don't want to leave."

Morris' 2 Train Robotics team is named for the subway line students



MELISSA NANN

Malik Shuford, right, a senior at Morris High School, and Wayne Penn, a mentor from Columbia University, carry the team's robot off the playing field. Next stop, competing for the national championship.

took to the Columbia University laboratory where they built the robot. At the Riverbank regional, judges awarded the team the engineering inspiration award, the contest's second most prestigious prize. It recognized the team's efforts to encourage other young engineers by mentoring a technology team at Intermediate School 162 and rookies from the elite Bronx High School of Science.

"Knowing we're from the South Bronx, no one would think that we could be engineers or that we could be involved with something positive," said Morris team captain Sashanna Saunches, 16.

Borough high schools brought

home other prizes, such as the rookie award presented to the Pius Princesses from St. Pius V High School on Courtlandt Street in Mott Haven.

The Princesses made history competing as the state's first all-girl team. With leather tool belts at their hips, the girls stood out in hot pink T-shirts and rhinestone tiaras, silver-star decals twinkling at their temples. The girls struggled with their motor, which repeatedly broke down during the contest.

"Next year, we'll be better prepared," said team captain Maryann Colon, 16.

Samuel Gompers Vocational and Technical High School in Port

Morris won the team spirit award. Herbert H. Lehman High School on East Tremont Avenue also won a rookie award. Evander Childs High School and Bronx Science also participated.

Adults serving as advisers and mentors on the projects were as fanatical as the students in cheering on their schools' teams. Many admitted to learning about engineering alongside the teenagers.

"If you can hook kids into science and technology at an early age," Israel said, "they stay interested."

Additional reporting by Daniel Burke.

Science has a budding star

By Ke Xu

While other teenagers were enjoying their summer vacations, Yi-Chen Zhang labored over hundreds of cockroaches at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.

The work paid off for Zhang, 17, a Bronx High School of Science senior. She is one of two city students to win top awards at the prestigious Intel Talent Search, a nationwide competition.

Until last year, when she submitted her research on the relationship between pesticide use and asthma-triggering allergens to the contest, Zhang spent summers encased in a double layer of lab coats, latex gloves and goggles, so fearful was she that her study subjects might touch her skin. "They are not my favorite animals," she said, laughing at the memory.

This year, 1,600 students submitted applications and research papers for the Intel Talent Search, considered one of the top high school research

competitions. Forty finalists were selected to compete in early March at the National Academy of Science in Washington, D.C. Zhang won a \$20,000 scholarship for finishing eighth.

"This is an experience that I would never forget," said Zhang, recounting her visit with Vice President Dick Cheney and Sen. Hillary Clinton of New York.

Zhang could not speak a word of English seven years ago when her parents, who were artists in China, sent for her from Shanghai, China. While learning the language, she discovered a love of science.

"It was the only subject I was good at," said Zhang, who now speaks fluent English.

In 2000, she met the woman who became her mentor, Dr. Ginger Chew, an immunologist at Columbia. Chew worked with Zhang's science class on a project measuring allergens in city public schools. Zhang, then a freshman, asked Chew to continue working with her.

Chew wanted to test whether there was a relationship between the

amount of pesticides used to kill cockroaches and the level of asthma-triggering allergens released in the feces of cockroaches that ate the dead ones.

The project excited Zhang's interest. She had friends with asthma who had difficulty breathing. But even though asthma is on the rise nationally, she never thought her work would interest the judges.

"I thought nobody cared about cockroaches," said Zhang, half joking. When she heard her name announced, she thought, "You are kidding, right?"

Chew was impressed by Zhang's politeness, patience, eloquence and persistence. "She has the highest motivation to be a researcher and greatest potential I've ever seen," Chew said.

Zhang's work — using chemical solutions, mouse antibodies and electric charges to measure the allergen concentration and separate proteins by size — would have been difficult even for graduate students.

The morning Zhang returned from the awards ceremony, she

went directly to school with suitcase in hand to take makeup examinations.

"It was not fun," she said. But she received hugs and greetings from her friends and teachers.

"They treated me like I am a celebrity," said Zhang. "The good thing about the Bronx Science is more like a family, very warm. You get to know the teachers on a personal level."

Outside school, Zhang, 5-foot-8 and slender with wire-framed glasses, also enjoys oil painting with her best friend, Fei Yang Xu. "She is a very smart and caring person," Xu said. "I admire her."

Now, Zhang hopes to compete in the New York State regional Federal Reserve Bank Challenge with her economics class. The big reward would be to meet Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan, whom she respects.

Zhang has been accepted by the University of Chicago but has not decided what college she will attend. She said she hopes to earn a Ph.D. and a



KE XU

Yi-Chen Zhang hopes to help millions of people as a future immunologist.

medical degree, then work for the National Institutes of Health as an immunologist.

"Some people study science because they have to," Zhang said. "I study science because I love to."